

HB 535 -- MOTORCYCLE HELMETS

SPONSOR: Roden

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on General Laws by a vote of 8 to 3.

This bill requires anyone under 18 with a training permit to wear a motorcycle helmet and requires anyone 18 years of age or older who wishes to ride without a helmet to provide proof of insurance.

The penalty for failure to wear protective headgear as required in this subsection is an infraction for which a fine not to exceed \$25 may be imposed.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that this is a personal choice issue. A motorcycle rider should have the choice of whether or not to wear a helmet without government interference. Helmets don't save lives, they are just designed to reduce injury. We should be stressing accident avoidance techniques not helmet use. Most accidents are caused by people over the age of 50 so there is no logical reason for requiring 18 year olds to wear helmets.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Roden; Bob Hawkins; William Kempker, Freedom of Road Riders; Abate for Missouri; and Joe Widmer.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that we should not compromise when it comes to saving lives. We don't allow athletes to play football without a helmet and we shouldn't allow anyone to ride a motorcycle without one. The state has an interest in preventing these accidents because ultimately the state pays for the care of those persons who suffer severe or debilitating injuries. Even if the individual has health insurance at the time of the accident, if he or she becomes permanently disabled he or she will ultimately qualify for state support.

Testifying against the bill were Maureen Cunningham, Brain Injury Association of Missouri; Robert Grider, Missouri Motorcycle Safety (MMSP); Missouri State Medical Association; Missouri Psychiatric Association; Missouri Hospital Association; AAA Auto Club Of Missouri; Missouri College Of Emergency Physicians; Michael Sparks; Missouri Academy of Family Physicians; and Bill Whitfield, Missouri Department of Transportation.